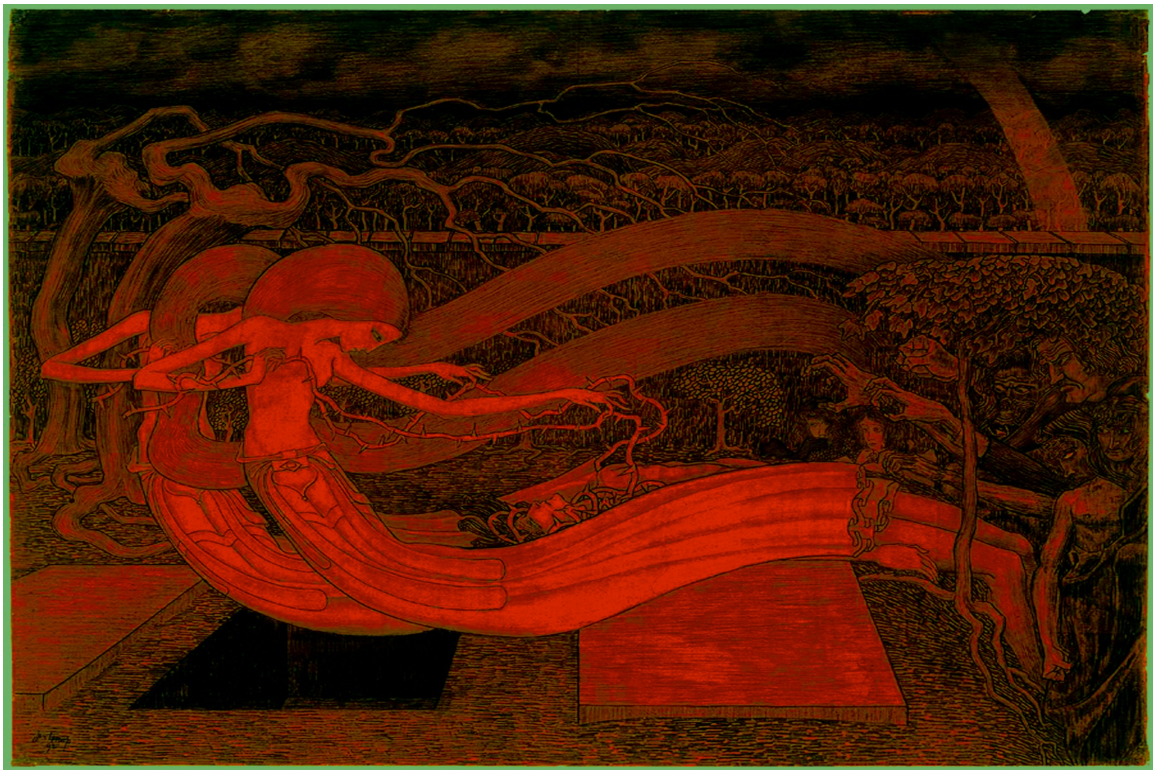


Philosophies of Death and Dying

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This course is a philosophical exploration of the ways human beings have faced mortality. Socrates reputedly said that philosophy was a preparation for death. Hobbes said that the dread of death inspired religion, while Schopenhauer spoke of the afterlife as a metaphysical consolation. Ancient cultures often saw the end of life as the continuance of the cyclical death and rebirth of nature. Others created elaborate rituals to preserve the existence of the soul into other incarnations. Some have devised means of refusing death, while others have perpetuated themselves symbolically, through identification with their offspring or nature. This course bridges philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology to discover the ways human beings conceive, contemplate, and deny death.



Required Texts:

Jonathan Westphal & Carl Levenson: *Life and Death*
Frederick Holck: *Death and Eastern Thought*
Shelly Kagan: *Death*
Ernest Becker: *The Denial of Death*
Walter Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*

Assignments and Grading:

In *addition* to the required reading, the students will be assigned:

1) A midterm essay
of 4-6 pages
(40 % of total grade)

2) A final take-home essay exam
of 5-7 pages
(40% of total grade)

3) The task of participating in class!

You are expected to come to class prepared for a cordial and informed discussion of the material
(20% of total grade)

* **Grading** will be determined by the effort of the student, her/his evidence of having carefully read and contemplated the material, and her/his expression of independent thought on the ideas.

Late assignments will suffer penalties as follows: the subtraction of one grade increment for every class the assignment is late.

* **Attendance** is mandatory. After the 3rd absence one letter grade will be subtracted from your final course grade. **Lateness** will not be tolerated. It is rude and disruptive, and may be considered a complete absence. Visible lack of preparation for a session will also be counted as a missed class and will result in a proportional deduction of points from the final grade.

* **Readings** consist of the required texts. There will also be a number of *optional* handouts supplied to help students understand the primary readings and provide perspective. Suggested readings appear below the required & optional handout readings and are for your interest and edification only.

IMPORTANT:

Class Credo and Ethic:

Like all classes, philosophy is about the free exchange of ideas as well as relentless questioning of beliefs and concepts. You are entitled to your beliefs but in a philosophy class *no idea is spared* from questioning or examination. If you do not want your beliefs or faith questioned, you are *strongly* advised to enroll in other classes more suitable to your beliefs and temperament.

Participation and Conduct:

Cell phones, computers, MP3 players, video games, and other non-class-related accouterments will absolutely be turned off during class.

There will be no web surfing, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, game playing, or any similar activities during class. These activities are disrespectful and disrupt the instructor and your fellow classmates. Students ignoring this rule will be considered absent, and it will impact your class participation grade.

Students are expected to engage in lively discussion and spirited exchange. They need not agree with one another and they are encouraged to question ideas, but they must also be respectful towards other students and the instructor. You can argue forcefully for or against an idea, but are required to comport yourselves with civility.

Communications:

You may email me with concerns and questions, but do not expect me to recapitulate class lectures or discussions. Feel free to come by for office hours if you wish to discuss the ideas or other issues. Office hours will be by appointment, and usually before or after class sessions.

Academic Honesty:

Violations of Rutgers policies on academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism and cheating will be grounds for failure, if not expulsion from the university.

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. WELCOME TO DEATH

Overview and Course Goals

Philosophical Spectra of Ideas on Death

How Death Haunts Us

Readings:

- Piven: Death in Fantasy and History (handout)
- Introductory Passages on Death: *The Book of Job* / Stephens: The Owl in the Sarcophagus / Rilke: The Ninth Elegy / Cocteau: *Orphee* (handouts)

Suggested Readings:

Obayashi: *Death and Afterlife*

Barrett: *Irrational Man*

Meltzer: *Death: An Anthology of Ancient Texts, Songs, Prayers, and Stories*

Choron: *Modern Man and Mortality*

Wilkins: *Death: A History of Man's Obsessions and Fears*

II. ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES OF DEATH (EASTERN TRADITIONS)

Death, Rebirth, & Murder

Death and Transmigration

Atman, and Anatman

Samsara and Nirvana

Readings:

- Raju: Foreword to *Death and Eastern Thought* (pp. 7-23)
- Holck: The Vedic Period / Sutras and the Mahabharata Epic (pp. 24-77)
- Shinn: Death and the Puranas (pp. 78-96)
- Sundararajan: The Orthodox Philosophical Traditions (pp. 97-113)
- Amore: The Heterodox Philosophical Systems (pp. 114-163)
- LaFleur: Japan (pp. 226-253)
- Dogen: Shoji (Life and Death) (handout)
- Sponberg: Attitude toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism (handout)
- Piven: Buddhism, Death, and the Feminine (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Wilson: *Charming Cadavers*

Abe: *Zen and Comparative Studies*

Faure: *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*

Faure: *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*

Paul: *Women in Buddhism*

Doniger: *The Implied Spider / The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (as Doniger-O'Flaherty)

Dogen: *Shobogenzo*

Tanahashi: *Moon in A Dewdrop*

Tsunetomo: *The Hagakure*

III. ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES OF DEATH (WESTERN TRADITIONS)

Death and Immortality

Death and Sin

Death, Deliverance, & Martyrdom

Readings:

- Cooper: The Fate of Mankind: Death and Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamia (handout)
- Murnane: Taking It With You: The Problem of Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt (handout)
- Mendenhall: From Witchcraft to Justice: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament (handout)
- Straw: "A Very Special Death": Christian Martyrdom in its Classical Context (handout)
- Aries: *Western Attitudes Toward Death* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Spencer: *Death in Ancient Egypt*

Eilberg-Schwartz: *The Savage in Judaism*

Bremmer: *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*

Harrison: *Themis*

Cormack: *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*

Aries: *The Hour of Our Death*

Huntington & Metcalf: *Celebrations of Death*

IV. TO PHILOSOPHIZE IS TO LEARN TO DIE

Practicing Death

Obsessions with Death

Madmen and Misogynists

Existentialism and Death

Readings:

- Plato: *Euthyphro & Phaedo* (Westphal, pp. 1-16)
- Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (pp. 17-21)
- Cicero: *Tusculan Disputations* (handout)
- Lucretius: *On the Nature of the Universe* (handout)
- Ovid: *Metamorphosis* (handout)
- Augustine: *Confessions* (pp. 22-29)
- Dionysius the Areopagite: *The Divine Names* (pp. 30-31)
- Aquinas: *Summa contra Gentiles* (pp. 32-56)
- Nietzsche: *The Gay Science* (pp. 57-58) * (plus handout)
- Sartre: *Nausea* (pp. 59-67)
- Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus* / Nuptials (pp. 68-79)
- Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (pp. 80-85)
- Beauvoir: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (handout)
- Nagel: *The Absurd* (pp. 86-97)
- Wittgenstein: *Notebooks* (pp. 146-151)
- Tolstoy: *Life* (pp. 152-161)

- Unamuno: *The Tragic Sense of Life* (handout)
- Heidegger: *Being and Time* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Tolstoy: *Confession / The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Abe: *Woman in the Dunes*

Loy: The Pain of Being Human. In *Lack and Transcendence*

Abe: The Problem of Death in East and West: Immortality, Eternal Life, Unbornness. In *Zen and Comparative Studies*

Arendt: Eternity versus Immortality

Kaufmann: *Existentialism, Religion, and Death*

Nishitani: *Religion and Nothingness*

Bauman: *Mortality, Immortality, & Other Life Strategies*

Lederer: *The Fear of Women*

Bronfen: *Over Her Dead Body*

V. RATIONALLY DEFEATING DEATH

The Irrationality of Fear

Rationality as Panacea

Corpses and Pain

Is Death Evil?

Readings:

- Nagel: Death (handout)
- Nussbaum: The Damage of Death: Incomplete Arguments and False Consolations (handout)
- Zimmerman: Personal Identity and the Survival of Death (handout)
- Murphy: Rationality and the Fear of Death (handout)
- Silverstein: The Evil of Death (handout)
- Kagan: Death (chapters 1-3, 6-10, 14, 16)
- Arthur Schopenhauer: On Man's Need for Metaphysics

Suggested Readings:

Toynbee: *Man's Concern with Death*

Fischer: *The Metaphysics of Death*

Bradley et al.: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*

Malpas & Solomon: *Death and Philosophy*

Taylor: *The Metaphysics and Ethics of Death*

Nagel: *Mortal Questions*

Tillich: *The Courage to Be*

Bartalos: *Speaking of Death*

Salazar & Nicholls: *The Philosophy of Spirituality*

Abe: *Zen and Western Thought*

VI. THE DENIAL OF DEATH

Dread and Terror

The Worm at the Core

Death and Ideology

Death and Violence

Readings:

- Becker: *The Denial of Death*
- Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*
- Solomon: *The Worm at the Core* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Liechty: *Transference and Transcendence*

Brown: *Life Against Death*

Davis: *Deracination*

Faber: *Culture and Consciousness*

Berger: *The Sacred Canopy*

Harrington: *The Politics at God's Funeral*

Winquist: *Desiring Theology*

Lifton: *The Broken Connection*

Yalom: *Existential Psychotherapy*

McCarthy: *Death Anxiety*

Ruitenbeek: *Death: Interpretations*

Feifel: *The Meaning of Death*

Hankiss: *Fears and Symbols*

Leifer: *The Happiness Project*

Liechty: *Death and Denial*

Berko: *The Path to Paradise*

VII. CONCLUSIONS & REVENANTS

Rationality and the Return of the Repressed

Displacements and Projections

Philosophical Exits and Resolutions

Fathoming and Enduring Death

Suggested Readings:

Des Pres: *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (esp. The Excremental Assault)

Wyshogrod: *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death*

Stein: *Evil as Love and as Liberation*

La Barre: *The Ghost Dance: Origins of Religion*

Patterson: *Rituals of Blood / The Children of Sisyphus*

Warren: *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*

Jonte-Pace: *Speaking the Unspeakable*

Bamyeh: *Of Death and Dominion:*

The Existential Foundations of Governance

Diamond: *Existential Roots of Anger, Rage, and Violence.*

In Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic

Hillman: *The Dream and the Underworld*

Firestone & Catlett: *Beyond Death Anxiety*

Brown: *Love's Body*